

REMARKS

Independent claims 1 and 22 have been amended to specify that the facestock is dimensionally unstable, and that the stiffness and tensile strength of the carrier sheet to which the facestock is laminated is sufficient to prevent the facestock from distorting more than 1.0% when the composite is exposed to temperatures above about 140°F and/or tension greater than about 5 PLI. Support for this limitation can be found in the specification at page 5, lines 13-15.

In the office actions mailed on March 7, 2006 and September 1, 2006, the examiner has repeatedly taken the position that the multilayer composites of the cited references inherently distort more than 1.0% under these temperature and tension conditions. Assuming that to be the case, it follows, therefore, that the facestocks of such prior art composites would also distort to the same extent, and that for at least this reason, none of the cited references anticipates independent claims 1 and 22 as now amended.

During the telephonic interview conducted on October 5, 2006, the examiner noted that the specification at page 3, lines 7-14 appeared to constitute an admission that the inventions of at least claims 1 and 2 were well known in the art. But that simply is not so for at least the following reasons:

- First, the prior art facestock in the disclosed example is coated onto a casting sheet as opposed to being a preformed film removably laminated to a carrier film. The present invention's removable lamination of preformed film facestocks onto carrier films has not previously been done, even though it would have been highly advantageous to do so because the range of dimensionally

unstable preformed films that can serve as facestocks is far broader than the range of dimensionally unstable cast films.

- Secondly, in the disclosed prior art example, the casting sheet is removed after the release liner is adhesively applied to one side of the facestock, and before the opposite side of the facestock is printed. Thus, the printed side remains exposed and vulnerable to scratching and abrasion, unless it is protected by an additional coating or the like. This differs from the present invention, where the carrier sheet is removably laminated to a top surface of the facestock, and the bottom surface is reversed printed, with the printing remaining protected on the underside of the facestock following its application to a substrate.

It will be seen, therefore, that the present invention is both different from and a marked improvement over the prior art example disclosed in the specification.

In the accompanying supplemental information disclosure statement, applicants have provided an unsworn English translation of Japanese Laid-Open Publication No. 2002-366040, the Japanese text of which was supplied previously with applicants' prior information disclosure statement.

In this Japanese reference, a film 2 is "laminated" to a mold release substrate 1 to provide a printing base material 5 (Figure 1 (a)), and an adhesive base material 6 is comprised of an adhesive layer 3 sandwiched between release liners 4, 4' (Figure 1 (b)). After the surface 21 of film 2 has been printed (layer 24), the release liner 4 is stripped from the adhesive base material 6, and the adhesive base material is adhered to the printed surface 21, resulting in the composite shown in Figure 2. The release liner 4' is then stripped off, and the

composite adhered to a substrate 8, after which the mold release substrate 1 is removed, with the result shown in Figure 3.


It will be seen from paragraph [0014] of the English translation that “lamination” as it relates to the combination of film 2 and mold release substrate 3 in fact comprises various coating and spraying techniques, where, as in the case of the prior art example described in the present specification and discussed above, the film 2 is formed on the mold release substrate 1, as opposed to being a preformed film laminated to the mold release substrate.

Also, from the resins, cross-linking agents and processing conditions described in the Japanese reference, it is apparent that the resulting printable films 2 are far more dimensionally unstable than the facestocks of the present invention, with yield strengths that are lower than the bond strengths between the films and their respective mold release substrates. As such, the films are prone to tearing. Hence the need for the adhesive layer 3 in the Japanese reference to have “a shape retaining characteristic” (paragraph [008], lines 7-8), and the further requirement that the mold release substrate 1 of the Japanese reference not be peeled off of the film 2 until after the film has been adhered to and additionally supported by a substrate 8 (paragraph [0030], lines 9-10).

None of this is required with the present invention because the bond strength at the interface between the facestock and carrier sheet is less than the yield strength of the facestock. Thus, with the present invention, the carrier sheet can be cleanly separated from the facestock without distorting or otherwise damaging the facestock, and separation can occur either before or after the release liner is removed and the printed facestock is adhesively secured to a substrate (page 4, lines 10-13).

In light of the amendments to claims 1 and 22 and the above comments, it is now believed that this application is in condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



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